THE IMPACT OF PHONEMIC AWARENESS IN PRONUNCIATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

Presented to
The Graduate Program
of
Greensboro College

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in
Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

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December 2020

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Abstract

This thesis project aims to help ESL teachers deliver instruction in phonemic awareness in order to improve pronunciation. Good English pronunciation is a key factor in improving intelligibility and comprehensibility. Many miscommunication problems are rooted in pronunciation due to poor English phonemic awareness and they may be prevented or fixed by training students through explicit phonemic instruction. For this reason, the incorporation of phonology and phonemic awareness in the ESL curriculum is essential to help students be successful in their oral competence of the target language. This project includes a virtual classroom with a compilation of strategies that can be used to improve phonemic awareness and avoid many miscommunication problems.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my daughter who has always been patient and encouraging throughout my whole professional development journey. I hope my dedication and determination motivates her to always pursue her dreams. Also, I dedicate this accomplishment to my parents and my sister who have always been a source of inspiration and support. They have found a way to push me through in spite of the distance. Finally, I dedicate my thesis to my husband who has always believed in me even when circumstances were too complicated. Thanks to all of them for being my pillars.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Michelle Plaisance for all her guidance and support during my graduate studies. Her knowledge, understanding and availability have far exceeded my expectations. A special thanks to Andrea Gil, my colleague, classmate and friend, for keeping me up to date and never leave me alone throughout this journey. We made it!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I have been working as an ESL teacher for over nine years in Costa Rica, my home country. I have taught English to Spanish-speaking students from different age groups and that has allowed me to observe some of the needs that students face. However, when I moved to the United States to teach in a Spanish Immersion program, I had the opportunity to observe the language-learning process of my own six-year old child. Even though, I had taught English for so long, the approach I saw was used with my daughter was something completely new to me. In my child's early second-language learning stages, the teacher gave special emphasis in phonemic awareness. As a result, the child's sound discrimination and production is very close to that of a native speaker.

I have seen many students in my home country who have been immersed in English classrooms as early as two years of age and who have learned in such environments for more than nine years. Even if they become able to communicate in the target language, they do not develop a native-like pronunciation. I believe this is because this type of approach, phonemically emphasized language pedagogy, is not commonly used in my home country. I have found that even after years of studying English and acquiring a vast vocabulary and good grammar, students can still struggle to understand what a native-speaking student is trying to communicate orally. The same issue arises when the L2 learner is exposed to a native speaker's language, as they do not seem to recognize sounds as they do with their non-native English teachers.

I, myself, can be counted among this group of students. I have been in English immersion classes in Costa Rica since I was three years old. My language proficiency in general is very good; however, when I moved to the United States, I was shocked to see the difference between the English I was taught in Costa Rica and the English spoken in United States. And while accent is a factor, I must say I was not able to discriminate between different sounds, which led to much miscommunication and confusion. As I stated before, this can be due to a combination of different factors. However, pronunciation and phonemic discrimination seem to be very strong ones.

As previously mentioned, I started noticing all this when I moved to the United States and had the opportunity to observe the approach used by my daughter's ESL teacher. She was giving special emphasis to phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness refers to the specific ability to focus on and manipulate individual sounds, phonemes, in spoken words. Phonemes are the smallest units comprising spoken language. Phonemes combine to form syllables and words. Research posits that those phonemic awareness skills that are already developed in the acquisition of the first language (L1), including knowledge of the phonological system of the L1, will be transferred to the second language (L2) (Anderson, 2004). Nevertheless, differences between the native phonological system and the target language affects the success of the transfer. The Spanish language consists of 24 phonemes; while there are 44 phonemes in the English language, including sounds represented by letter combinations such as /th/. This means that there are several phonemes in English that the Spanish speaking learner cannot transfer, due to the simple fact that they do not exist in the Spanish language. The less complicated the phonological structure of the language, the less sensitive to phonemic awareness the child seems

to be (McBride-Chang et al., 2008; Melhuish et al., 2008; Yeong & Rickard Liow, 2012). Hence, the need to explicitly teach English phonemes to ESL learners becomes more apparent.

Based on those observations, I have identified the need of improving phonemic awareness instruction in order to better the pronunciation and language development in general. My project consists in an online compilation of strategies aimed towards teachers, so that they can use them with their students to promote phonemic awareness in order to improve pronunciation and language development. I created a Google classroom with different modules that teachers or students themselves can access to read and apply the strategies stored in there.

I chose this online platform so that I, or any other teacher, would be able to access it from any location in the world. Also, I intend to keep expanding it as my research and experiences keep progressing. Last year, teachers from all over the world face the challenge of online teaching. This was indeed a challenging time for every teacher in their careers, but it was also a very rewarding one as we became more tech savvy and were able to explore the amazing tools provided by online platforms. During this time, I got to explore and work with Google classroom and found it to be a very student friendly platform; therefore, I decided to use it for my project. The ultimate goal for this project is to help both teachers and students throughout the world. The English language is a precious language and being able to communicate effectively through it is a goal for many people in the world. Hopefully, my project is helpful to the many students and teachers that are looking for practical phonemic awareness strategies to impact their pronunciation and language development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Learning to speak English as a second language is a growing trend throughout the world. People who speak English in addition to their native language reap a wide variety of cognitive, social and economic benefits which has motivated more students to become interested in learning English. However, one of the main challenges students face when learning the English language is effective oral communication. Fabre-Merchán et al. (2017) noted that many times this issue comes from a fear of mispronouncing a word, taking into consideration that the English language has specific phonetic variations that differ significantly from other languages. Goldenberg et al. (2014) demonstrated that Spanish-speaking students feel more motivated to speak in English when they acquire good English pronunciation. Good English pronunciation, in fact, leads to more effective communication. The objective of many teachers with their ESL learners is to avoid as many misunderstandings in communication as possible by placing more emphasis on students' understanding where and how phonemes are pronounced in the English language, teaching phonemic features and helping students to acquire pronunciation similar to native English speakers.

Pronunciation is an important factor in effective communication. This thesis studies the concept of phonemic awareness and the English as a second language learner. Additionally, strategies to develop phonemic awareness in ESL students are discussed. According to Shah and Freedman (2003), some web tools have proven to be great educational tools for promoting the acquisition of a second language through the development of phonemic awareness. In view of

the context we are living in right now, technological strategies are a great tool to investigate in order to help students achieve their language goals.

Pronunciation as an Important Factor in Communication

Pronunciation is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation, often with reference to some standard of correctness or acceptability". Pronunciation plays an important part in communication as it influences inteligibility and comprehensibility (Derwin & Munro, 2008). Fabre-Merchán et al. (2017) stated that the communicative competences of English language learners improve when they have some knowledge of the phonemic features characteristic of the English language. This knowledge helps students to try to acquire better pronunciation, similar to native English speakers, by helping students understand where and how each phoneme is pronounced.

Pronunciation seems to be a key factor in effective communication. However; it has been left out of classroom instruction for years. Darcy, Ewert, and Lidster (2012) reported that "pronunciation is difficult to teach for several reasons. Teachers are often left without clear guidelines and are confronted with contradictory purposes and practices for pronunciation instruction. Indeed, there is no well-established systematic way of deciding what to teach, and when and how to do it" (p. 93). Yet researchers and teachers alike agree that pronunciation instruction is important in improving intelligibility (Derwing et al., 1998). Derwin and Munro (2008) defined intelligibility broadly as "the degree of a listener's actual comprehension of an utterance" (p. 479).

An important aspect of pronunciation for an ESL speaker is accent. An accent is a different way of producing speech (Derwing & Munro, 2008). Whilst ESL speakers have an accent, and it is often easily detectible, this does not necessarily mean that it causes communication problems. Derwing and Munro (2008) stated that having an accent is not a sign of overall low proficiency and that it does not always affect communication; however, sometimes it does. They also mentioned that "intelligibility and accentedness are partially independent. In other words, it is possible to be completely intelligible and yet be perceived as having a heavy accent. The reverse doesn't happen. That is, speakers who are unintelligible will always be rated as having a heavy accent" (Derwing & Munro, 2008, p. 479).

Derwing and Munro (2005) noted that research can provide important information about which pronunciation elements impact comprehensibility and foreign accent, and this should be the focus of pronunciation instruction. For example, psycholinguistic research provides support for the idea that teachers should focus on teaching consonants over vowels in early pronunciation instruction. Darcy, Ewert, and Lidster (2012) reported that a mispronounced consonant might affect comprehensibility and word recognition more than a mispronounced vowel. This type of research into spoken word recognition can direct teachers towards aspects of speech production that should be targeted during instruction; this way learners can acquire a pronunciation that, even though it is accented, is the most comprehensible to the native listener.

The difference between the phonological systems of the learner's native language and the targeted language, in this case English, is one of the main reasons for pronunciation problems. Sebastian-Galles (2005) mentioned that pronunciation difficulties are, in part, a result of inaccurate perception of the L2, which is due, in part, to the influence of the first language's phonological system. In most cases, sounds that are not in the native language's phonological

system are hard for the learner to distinguish. The inability to distiguish those sounds also increases the difficulty in learning how to articulate them; this inability can also impinge their word understanding. Darcy et al. (2012) explained this through an example that stated that "word pairs such as "light" and "right" may sound the same for Japanese learners of English, word learning is considerably more difficult, and results in problems building appropriate representations for the words in their mental lexicon" (p. 94). However, findings from training studies suggested that sound distinction can be improved through training, and training in perception can also improve articulation abilities (Rvachew, Nowak & Cloutier, 2004). Darcy, Ewert, and Lidster (2012) noted that pronunciation instruction should be implemented from the very beginning of ESL teaching and should not be reserved for higher proficiency levels as it has typically been done. This is because, as stated by Best and Tyler (2007), research shows that "the bulk of perceptual and phonetic learning in late-onset SLA takes place within the first year of intensive exposure to the L2, implying that pronunciation is most malleable during the first few months" (p. 94).

The Role of Phonemic Awareness in ESL

Brice and Brice (2009) stated that phonological awareness is a general appreciation of the sounds of speech separate from their meaning while phonemic awareness is the ability to perceive, identify, and manipulate the phonemes in spoken language. According to Yeong and Rickard Liow (2012) phonemic awareness is a specific sub-skill of phonological awareness; it is the ability to segment words into constituting sounds and to be able to blend these sounds to form new words. Phonemes are the smallest units of speech and "phonemes are the basis for constructing onsets, rimes and syllables." (Wren, Hambly & Roulstone, 2012, p. 13). Le Roux et

al. (2017) stated that phonemic awareness skills develop during pre-school years and the early stages of learning to read, founding that:

> Children in Grades RR, R and 1 should understand that words are constructed by blending phonemes together, for example, 'cat' is formed by blending /k/, /æ/ and /t/. Simultaneously, the word 'cat' can be segmented into /k/, /æ/ and /t/. Learners should also be able to recognize that a difference in meaning occurs when the /k/ in 'cat' is replaced with /m/ and a new word, 'mat', is formed. (p.1).

The ability to read is a fundamental skill required for children to achieve academic success. Currently in the United States, the expectation is that all children should be able to read on grade level by third grade (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). When the child understands that a phoneme contributes to distinguishing meanings in words, phonemic awareness is developing. Fitzpatrick and Yuh (1997) metioned that phonemic awareness is a necessary early language literacy skill for the development of language skills in young learners. Studies demonstrate that phonemic awareness is a powerful predictor of reading success among children learning to read (Bryant et al., 1990). Berg and Stegelman (2003) stated that having a low level of phonemic awareness can result in language learning difficulties for many learners, especially in reading and spelling.

These findings are enlightening and true for native English speakers who are learning to read and write. However, it is important to analyze the relationship between phonemic awareness and the language acquisition of an ESL learner. Since "phonological awareness of sounds in the second language cannot be presumed in second language learners" (Goswami & Chen, 2010, p. 30). teachers must turn to explicit phonological instruction. Goswami and Chen (2010) stated that second language learners must know the linguistically significant phonemes and allophones

in the target language in order to read, write, speak fluently, and to avoid miscommunication. Languages' phonological systems vary in the number and type of sounds and phonemes and how these are combined. Duncan (1983) mentioned that a number of educators have concluded that some of the problems faced by language-minority children in learning to read are caused by phonological differences between English and the home language."

According to Liberman and Mattingly's motor speech model cited by Brice and Brice (2009), bilingual children are capable of perceiving only those sounds that they can say. Their perception is influenced by their ability to articulate those phonemes. In other words, an ESL learner's capability of perceiving and understanding English phonemes will directly depend on the fluent articulation of the phonemes themselves. The learner's native languages influence their acquisition of the second one in various ways. Brice and Brice (2009) mentioned the concept of interlanguage phonology, which they define as "the study of how a first language (L1) phonology interacts with and affects the L2 phonology" (p. 209). Also, Carey (2002) reported that success of phonological transfer among bilingual individuals is directly dependent on the amount that L1 interference is minimized. Many sounds in English are not included in other languages' phonological systems; hence, the ESL learner needs to learn new sounds in order to communicate effectively. For example, "Because of the lack of the /š/ phoneme in Spanish, some Spanish speakers may mispronounce the English phoneme /š/ as /č/, resulting in possible miscommunication" (Goswami & Chen, 2010, p. 31).

ESL learners not only need to learn to produce sounds that are new to them because they are not in their native language's phonological system, but also need to unlearn the native language sound related to a specific phoneme and learn the target language's sound given to that same phoneme. Flege (1987) stated that similar sounds in two languages are harder to acquire

than new phonemes. For instance, “saying the English /v/ (not found in Spanish) is easier than saying the English /d/ versus the Spanish /d/ in the initial word position. In the above example, the complexity in learning the English /d/ versus the Spanish /d/ relates to the voice onset time features of these two sounds” (Brice & Brice, 2009). Jared and Szucs (2002) noted that if a bilingual’s two languages share the same alphabet but with different pronunciations for the same letters, if phonological representations for both languages are activated at the same time, then there will be two conflicting pronunciations. Ferroli and Shanahan (1992) supported this idea by explaining that Spanish speakers would likely perceive English sounds as if they are Spanish and produce sounds in a Spanish-like way; most Spanish speakers’ mistakes resulted from confusing voiced and unvoiced consonants.

All of these research findings back the incorporation of phonology and phonemic awareness in the ESL curriculum. Many miscommunication problems rooted in pronunciation and poor L2 phonemic awareness may be prevented or fixed by training students through explicit phonemic instruction. Kenworthy (1987) reported a very interesting premise by saying that language learners must develop concern and awareness for pronunciation because unintelligible speech resulting from inadequate phonological accuracy causes mutual frustration for both listeners and speakers. However, good and effective pronunciation is accomplishable. Strickland and Riley-Ayers (2006) reported that teaching phonemic awareness to young learners can help them develop their language skills better than those who do not receive such an education. Moreover, researchers in a study with struggling foreign language students found that “when they were explicitly taught the phonology of the foreign language, they were able to learn the target language fairly successfully, and also improve their phonological skills” (Schwarz, 1998, p.1). Although this might not sound very surprising, especially when talking about younger

learners, there is also research that shows that when trained in English pronunciation and phonemic awareness adult learners “too can have almost native-like second language pronunciation” (Moyer, 2004).

Strategies to develop phonemic awareness in ESL students

Although many teachers recognize their lack of knowledge or direction in teaching pronunciation (Derwing & Foote, 2011), evidence from teacher research suggests that changing a teacher’s practices is very difficult (Johnson, 1999). This shows that it is extremely relevant to provide teachers with a practical tool or compilation of strategies in order to help students improve their phonemic awareness and overall pronunciation of the English language. Wren, Hambly and Roulstone (2012) reported that there are activities that can be used to assess and promote these skills including segmentation, deletion, detection, substitution, blending and discrimination. Strategies like minimal pairs, odd one out, dictation and voicing are used to help students develop phonemic awareness and improve their pronunciation (Wickham, 2020).

One of the biggest struggles in teaching phonemic awareness and pronunciation to ESL learners is the level of exposure students have to native English speakers and authentic material (Fabre-Merchan et al., 2017). However, technology helps teachers to create learning conditions that promote the development of phonemic awareness through real exposure and interaction with native English speakers and real English sounds. Also, on technological tools to use in phonemic awareness teaching, Fabre-Merchan et al. (2017) mentioned that virtual platforms such as: YouTube, broadcast, and TED videos provide students with opportunities to experience the English language in authentic settings and “Sounds: pronunciation app” and “International Phonetic Alphabet” are great phonemic resources to acquire the correct pronunciation of each

sound. Also, Thajakan and Sucaromana (2014) evaluated a multimedia Computer-Assisted Language Learning Program (CALL) and considered it effective when used as a supportive tool to enhance young learners' phonemic awareness. Another study on enhancing young learners' phonemic awareness with multimedia CALL programs conducted by Cassady and Smith (2003) in many countries has shown positive results.

Wickham (2020) provided a simple overview of what students need in order to improve their phonemic pronunciation. First, they need to hear the difference between the English sound and their native language's sound. Then, they need to know how to make the sound; they need to understand how and where that sound is produced. Lastly, they need to recognize when reading when and how to make the correct sound. Johnson (2019) mentioned that one of the most conventional methods to start teaching phonemic awareness is through phonics. Phonics is the learning of the individual sound of a letter or set of letters, vowels, and consonants when learning to read. Another important aspect to teach students is the position of the mouth and tongue in every different phoneme; students need to see and understand how each phonemes looks like in the mouth when correctly produced. For older students, it may be helpful to show illustrations and to model where to properly place the tongue and lips to create a specific sound (Johnson, 2019).

A combination of methods and lots of practice is necessary in order to develop phonemic awareness and correct English pronunciation. Wickham (2020) noted that just by doing a couple of activities once or twice is not going to remediate the problem; the important thing is to integrate these activities into your class' routine whenever possible, and to keep reinforcing the different sounds.

Pronunciation is a key factor in effective communication. Language learners must develop a concern and awareness for appropriate pronunciation in order to avoid miscommunication issues. ESL pronunciation can be improved by training students through explicit phonemic instruction. For this reason, the incorporation of phonology and phonemic awareness in the ESL curriculum is recommended.

Chapter 3: Project Design

In this chapter, I explain the rationale behind creating a compilation of strategies for developing phonemic awareness skills in young English language learners. This compilation of strategies aims to help teachers and parents when planning how to provide young learners with explicit phonemic awareness instruction. Taken together, these strategies seek to help teachers and parents to improve the pronunciation and development of the English language in young learners. The compilation is presented in an online simplified and blended learning management system called Google Classroom.

One of the main challenges English language learners face is the effective development of the speaking competence. Fabre-Merchán et al. (2017) noted that many times this issue comes from a fear of mispronouncing a word. Goldenberg et al. (2014) demonstrated that Spanish-speaking students feel more motivated to speak in English when they acquire good English pronunciation. In addition, Bishop and Bishop (1996) stated that EFL students enhance their English pronunciation when they are aware of the difference between their native language and English, which is possible when they acquire phonemic awareness. Therefore, it would seem necessary for English-language learners to acquire phonemic awareness in order to improve their pronunciation, fluency and confidence when communicating orally in the English language.

Unfortunately, however, such pronunciation instruction has been left out of classroom instruction in many English programs. There are possible reasons for this neglect. Darcy, Ewert, and Lidster (2012) stated that pronunciation is difficult to teach. Teachers are often left without

clear guidelines and are confronted with contradictory purposes and practices for pronunciation instruction. There is no well-established systematic way for pronunciation instruction. Nonetheless, Derwing et al. (1998) noted that researchers and teachers alike agree that pronunciation instruction is important in improving intelligibility. For this reason, this project aims to be a handy strategy "toolbox" for teachers who are looking for simply explained strategies to work with students who need to improve their English pronunciation through phonemic awareness training.

Phonemic awareness is strongly endorsed as an effective indicator in reading acquisition and pronunciation in the context of learning English as a second language. Yeong and Rickard Liow (2012) noted that phonemic awareness (PA), as a specific sub-skill of phonological awareness, is the refined ability to segment words into constituting sounds and blend these sounds to form new words. Hambly and Roulstone (2012) observed that there are activities that can be used to assess and promote phonemic awareness skills including segmentation, deletion, detection, substitution, blending and discrimination. Some classroom activities such as rhyming, minimal pairs, odd one out, dictation and voicing are also used to help students develop phonemic awareness and improve their pronunciation.

For this project, I decided to use an online simplified and blended learning management system called Google Classroom. Using an online platform to compile the strategies is an effective and practical way to provide teachers with this information. Both teachers and students have had to adjust to the context in which we are living right now and in order to do that they have become more tech savvy. Using technology in the classroom accordingly has many advantages. For instance, an online compilation, like the one this project is presenting, can be accessed from any part of the world with an internet connection. In addition, the material

compiled is not going to be lost since it is stored in the cloud. Finally, this material can be edited and enriched by the creator, in this case myself. My long-term objective is to keep researching and learning throughout my teaching practice to keep adding strategies to this Google classroom.

The online format of this project also helps resolve a common obstacle in pronunciation teaching, namely the lack of exposure to native-spoken material. Through the use of songs and videos from English native speakers, students will be able to listen how English native speakers sound and how they produce sounds. This is a very interesting feature considering all the variation of accents English native speakers can have. I believe that exposing the students to as many accents as possible will help them to develop better listening skills and help them to participate in settings with diverse oral production.

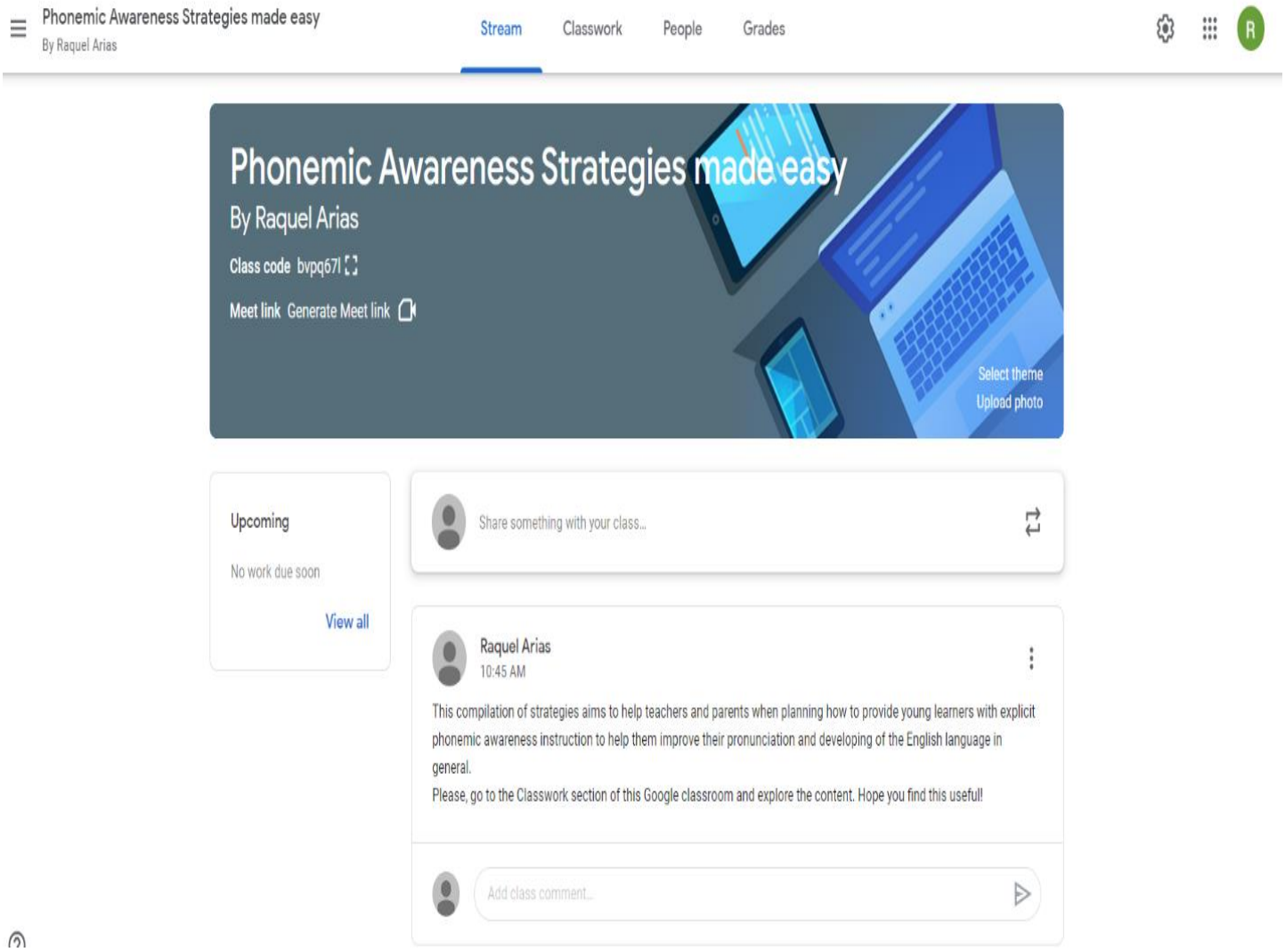
This project is organized as a Google classroom named Phonemic Awareness Strategies made easy and it explores five categories of strategies: 1) Rhyming, 2) Segmenting and blending, 3) Beginning and ending sounds, 4) Syllable study and 5) Songs and videos. Each of the five categories feature activities that teachers can apply in order to train students in phonemic awareness.

Chapter 4:The Project

The present project is the design of an electronic resource via Google classroom that seeks to provide teachers and parents with strategies to develop phonemic awareness in young English learners. Research demonstrates that phonemic awareness is strongly endorsed as an effective indicator in reading acquisition and pronunciation in the context of English language learning. Effective English pronunciation is important in improving intelligibility for ESL speakers. Therefore, pronunciation instruction and phonemic awareness teaching are of vital importance when teaching English.

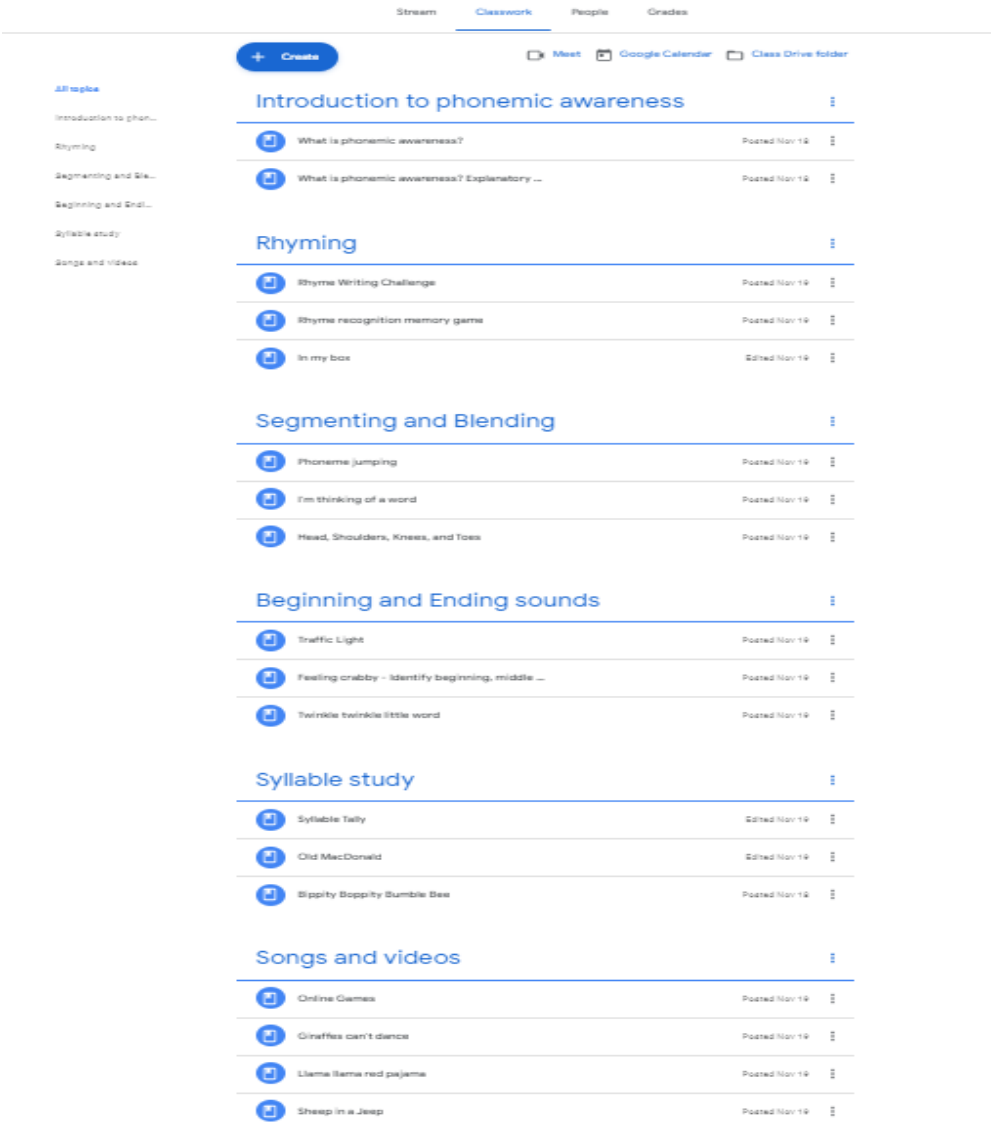
This compilation of activities aims to provide teachers with practical, fun and engaging activities to help young learners be more aware of the English phonemics and hence improve their pronunciation. The Google classroom platform provides a very user friendly presentation and all the strategies featured in this project include the materials teachers would need. This online compilation can be accessed from any place of the world with an internet connection and the materials are downloadable and reproducible. Teachers just need the joining code in order to join the classroom. To access the project, go to: https://classroom.google.com/h. Click the addition symbol in the top right corner of the screen and type the joining code. The joining code is: bvpq671. After joining, the user is able to navigate the website and access all the strategies and materials. In addition, they can comment on each startegy in order to give feedback and ask questions about the strategies, if needed.

The name of the Google classroom is: Phonemic Awareness Strategies made easy. The homepage has a short introduction to inform the user about the objective of the project, in addition, directions to go to the classwork section of the website where the strategies are featured. Users can make comments in this section. If users have questions regarding how to navigate the page or questions regarding the concept of phonemic awareness, they can post their questions through the page and the page owner, in this case myself, will respond when appropriate.



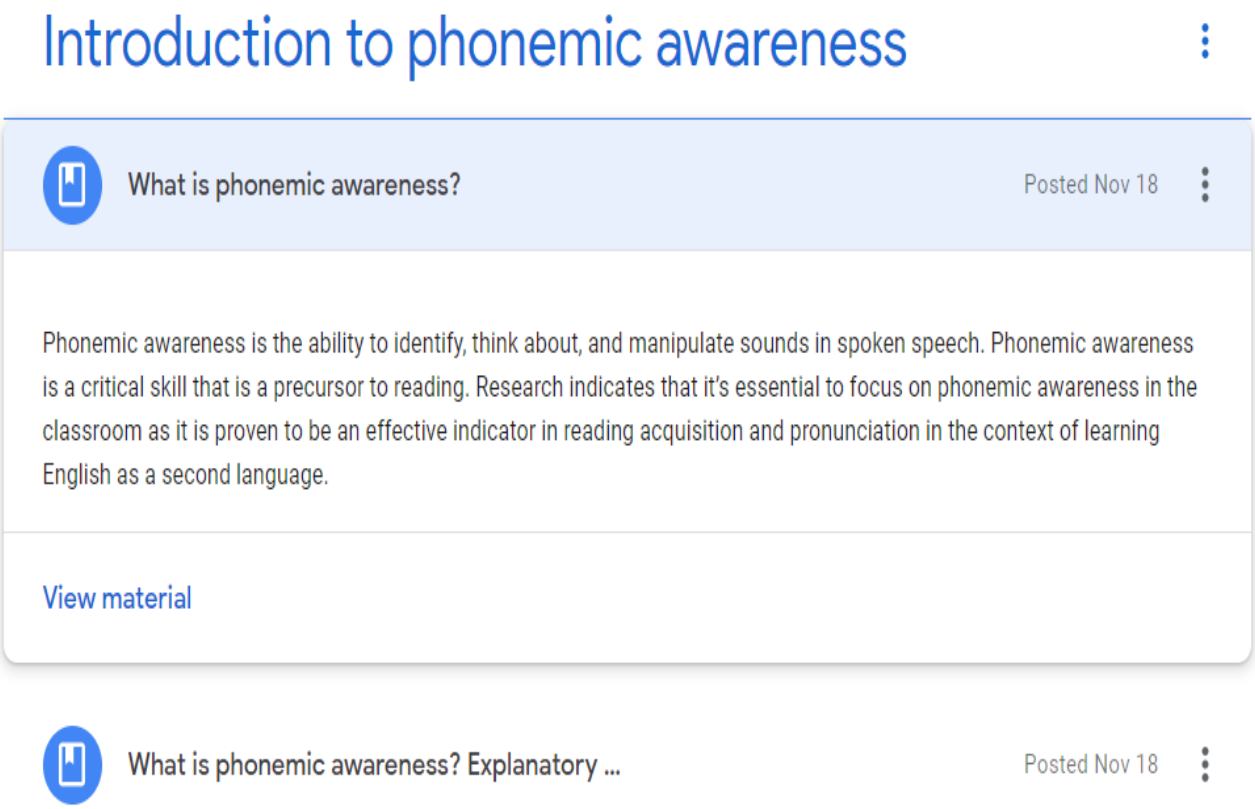
Once in the classwork section, the user will find six subheadings: 1) Introduction to phonemic awareness, 2) Rhyming, 3) Segmenting and blending, 4) Beginning and ending sounds, 5) Syllable study, and 6) Songs and videos.

The first subheading is the introduction; it features basic information to educate the user on phonemic awareness. After the introduction, the next four subtopics organize the strategies by categorizing them into different phonemic awareness subskills: rhyming, segmenting and blending, beginning and ending sounds, and syllable study. These four subskills subheadings are the ones that actually feature the strategies to be used in the classroom. Lastly, the Songs and videos subheading contains links to read alouds, songs and online phonemic games.



1) Introduction to phonemic awareness

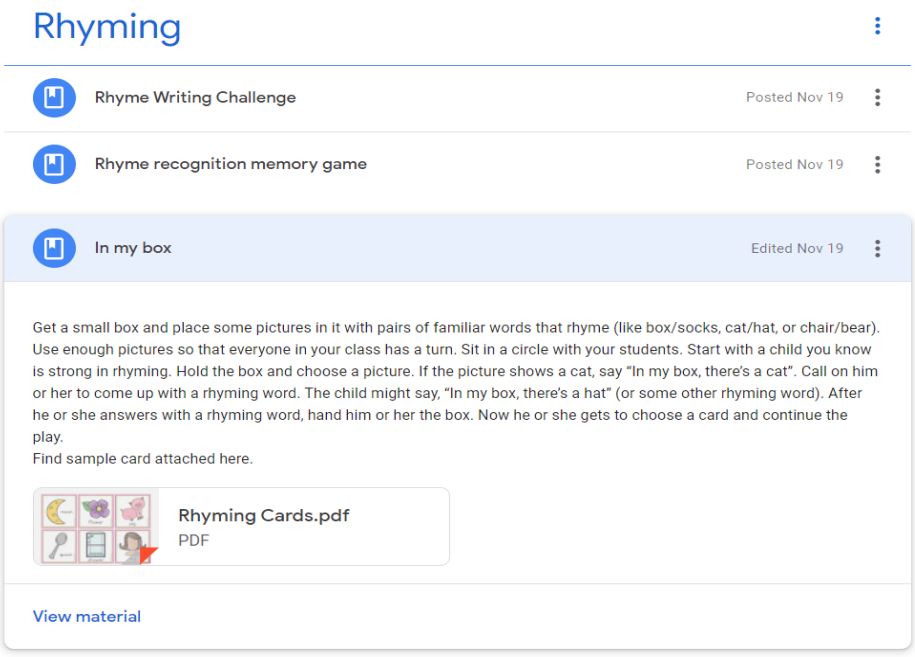
The first subtopic is named Introduction to phonemic awareness. This subtopic features two posts. The first one is a short and concise explanation of the concept of phonemic awareness and the reason behind the importance to focus in this skill during the early reading process. Phonemic awareness is the ability to identify, think about, and manipulate sounds in spoken speech. Phonemic awareness is a critical skill that is a precursor to reading. Research indicates that it is essential to focus on phonemic awareness in the classroom as it is proven to be an effective indicator in reading acquisition and pronunciation in the context of learning English as a second language. The second post is a link to an explanatory video that ellaborates on this topic.

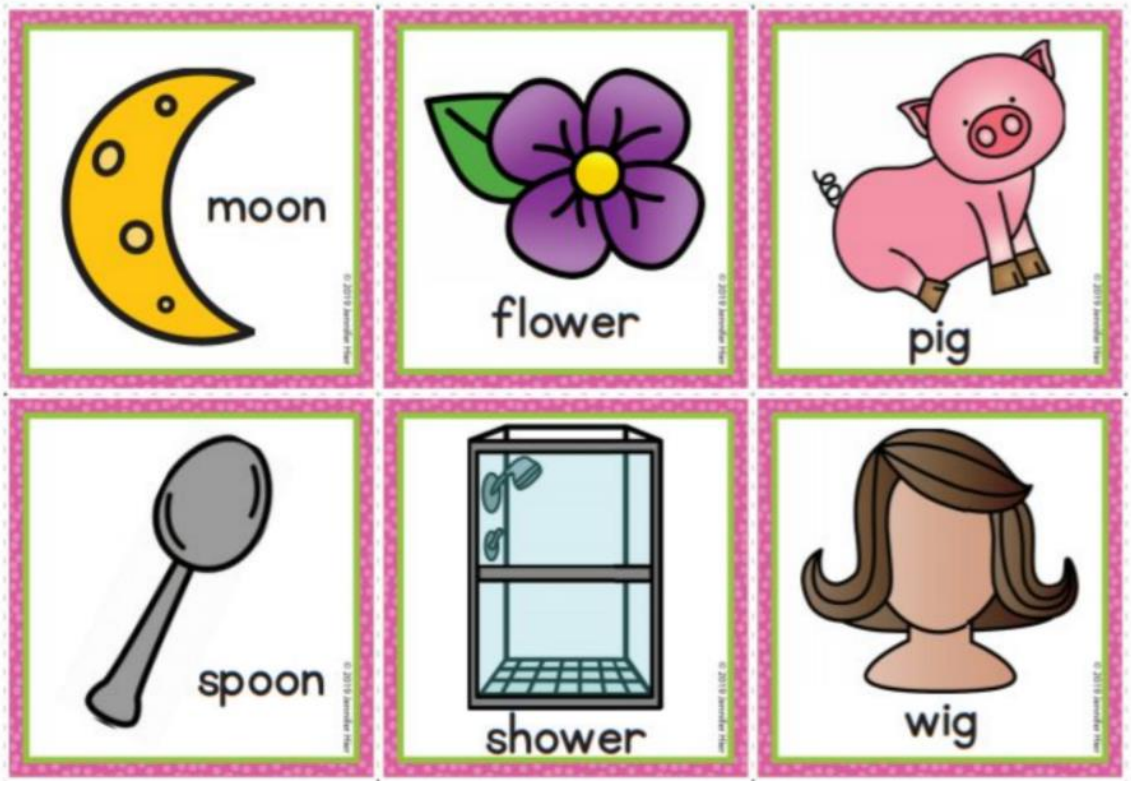


2) Rhyming

Recognizing rhyming words is a basic subskill of phonemic awareness. It requires that children listen closely to the sounds in words and recognize what sounds sound alike. Recognizing rhyming helps children understand that words are made up of separate parts. There are three activities listed under this category: rhyme writing challenge, rhyme recognition memory game and in my box. Instructions and materials to download and print are included in each post.

For the activity “In my box” the teacher needs to get a small box and place some pictures in it with pairs of familiar words that rhyme (like box/socks, cat/hat, or chair/bear). Make sure to use enough pictures so that everyone in the class has a turn. Sit in a circle with the students. Start with a child who is strong in rhyming. Hold the box and choose a picture. If the picture shows a cat, say “In my box, there’s a cat”. Call on him or her to come up with a rhyming word. The child might say, “In my box, there’s a hat” (or some other rhyming word). After he or she answers with a rhyming word, hand him or her the box. Now he or she gets to choose a card and continue the play. This post features a set of twelve rhyming cards for teachers to use with their students.

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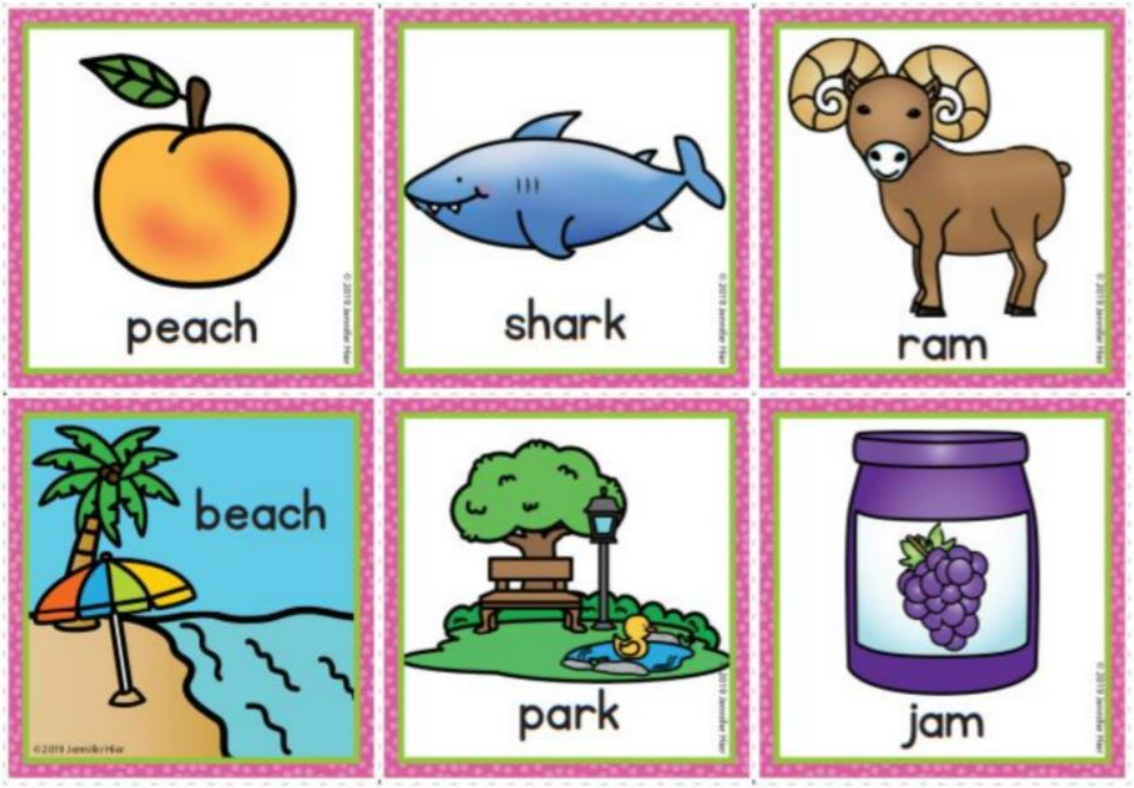
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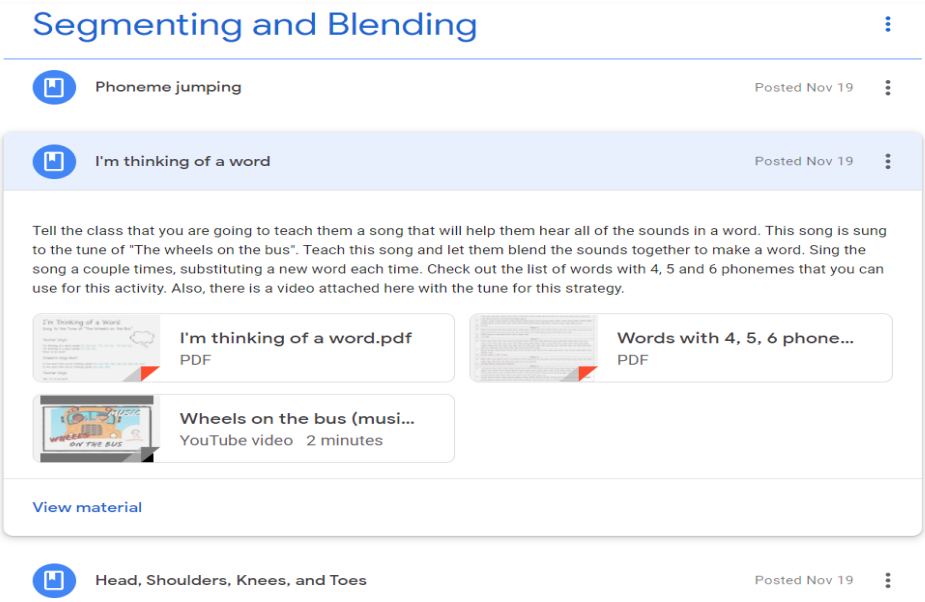
jam

3) Segmenting and blending

In phonemic awareness blending is the ability to hear the individual sounds in a word, put the sounds together, and say the word that is formed. If a child can blend sounds, he or she will eventually be able to see letters in a word, think about the sounds the letters make, and blend the sounds to say the word. Segmenting, on the other hand, is the process of breaking a word apart into its individual sounds. It is the opposite of blending sounds together to form a word. However, the two often go hand-in-hand. Segmenting and blending activities help build phonemic awareness and they are essential in developing reading skills.

The segmenting and blending subheading of the website features three engaging strategies: phoneme jumping, I'm thinking of a word, and head, shoulders, knees and toes. For the strategy "I'm thinking of a word," the teacher tells the class that she/he is going to teach them a song that will help them hear all of the sounds in a word. This song is sung to the tune of "The wheels on the bus". Teach this song and let the students blend the sounds together to make a word. Sing the song a couple times, substituting a new word each time. Check out the list of words with 4, 5 and 6 phonemes that you can use for this activity. Also, there is a video attached in the post with the tune for this strategy.



I'm Thinking of a Word

Sung to the Tune of "The Wheels on the Bus"

Teacher Sings:

I'm thinking of a word named /t/ /e/ /n/, /t/ /e/ /n/, /t/ /e/ /n/,
I'm thinking of a word named /t/ /e/ /n/,
What is my word?

Students Sings Back:

Is the word that you're thinking called ten, ten, ten, ten, ten, ten, ten, ten, ten?
Is the word that you're thinking called ten, ten, ten?

Teacher Sings:

Yes, ten is my word.

Words with 4, 5, & 6 Phonemes (Sounds)

	Short a
4	crab, drab, scab, grab, stab, black, crack, smack, snack, track, glad, brag, drag, flag, snag, clam, cram, gram, slam, camp, damp, lamp, ramp, champ, bran, clan, plan, scan, span, band, hand, land, sand, bank, rank, sank, tank, yank, thank, clap, slap, trap, flap, snap, brash, clash, crash, flash, slash, smash, thrash, trash, brat, flat, scat, shaft, pant, mask, task, cast, fast, last, past, vast, brass, class, glass, grass
5	clamp, cramp, scamp, stamp, tramp, bland, brand, grand, stand, sprang, blank, clank, crank, drank, flank, Frank, plank, prank, spank, scrap, strap, tract, craft, draft, grant, plant, slant, flask, blast, scratch, clasp, scalp, splat, scram
6	strand
	Short e
4	bled, bred, fled, Fred, shred, sled, sped, smell, spell, swell, bend, lend, mend, send, tend, bent, cent, dent, rent, lent, sent, tent, went, best, nest, pest, rest, test, vest, west, chest, fret, bless, dress, press, left, help, next, weld
5	blend, spend, trend, spent, blest, stress, slept, crept
6	strength
	Short i
4	brick, click, flick, slick, stick, trick, grid, skid, slid, swig, twig, drill, grill, frill, skill, spill, still, thrill, trill, brim, grim, slim, swim, trim, grin, skin, spin, twin, bring, cling, fling, sling, sting, swing, kink, link, mink, pink, rink, sink, wink, chink, think, hint, lint, mint, tint, blip, clip, drip, flip, grip, skip, slip, snip, trip, grit, skit, slit, spit, crib, cliff, sniff, stiff, gift, lift, shift, tilt, wilt, swish, disk, risk, Swiss, list, mist, switch
5	sprig, spring, string, blink, brink, clink, drink, shrink, stink, flint, print, strip, split, drift, swift, thrift, brisk, frisk, twist, blimp, crisp
6	sprint, splint, script, scrimp
	Short o
4	blob, slob, snob, block, clock, crock, flock, frock, smock, stock, clod, plod, prod, clog, frog, smog, prong, crop, drop, flop, plop, slop, stop, blot, clot, plot, slot, spot, trot, cross, blotch
5	strong, blond, stomp, frost, splotch
	Short u
4	club, grub, shrub, stub, cluck, pluck, stuck, truck, bluff, fluff, gruff, scuff, stuff, drug, plug, shrug, slug, snug, drum, plum, scum, slum, swum, bump, dump, hump, jump, lump, pump, spun, stun, clung, flung, stung, swung, bunk, dunk, hunk, junk, punk, sunk, chunk, blush, brush, crush, flush, plush, slush, thrush, spud, grudge, bunch, hunch, lunch, munch, punch, bunt, hunt, punt, runt, plus, bust, dust, just, must, rust
5	scrub, struck, strum, clump, grump, plump, slump, stump, trump, sprung, strung, drunk, flunk, plunk, shrunk, skunk, slunk, spunk, stunk, trunk, strut, crunch, blunt, grunt, stunt, thrust, trust, crust, frump
6	scrunch
	Long a
4	brace, grace, place, space, trace, blade, grade, spade, trade, brake, drake, flake, snake, stake, blame, flame, frame, crane, plane, flare, glare, scare, snare, spare, stare, crate, plate, skate, state, brave, grave, slave, stage, grape, blaze, craze, frail, snail, trail, brain, drain, grain, plain, Spain, stain, train, spray, stray, braid, stair, claim, faint, splay
5	scrape, strafe, sprain, strain
	Long e
4	creak, sneak, speak, steal, cream, dream, steam, clear, smear, spear, treat, bleed, breed, freed, greed, speed, steed, treed, creep, sleep, steep, sweep, fleet, greet, sleet, sweet, clean, creek, Greek, sleek, steel, green, sneer, steer, spree, least, feast
5	streak, stream, scream, street, screen, screech
	Long i
4	price, slice, spice, twice, bride, glide, pride, slide, crime, grime, prime, slime, brine, shrine, spine, swine, drive, thrive, bribe, tribe, spike, smile, gripe, spite, bright, flight, fright, slight, spry
5	splice, stride, strive, scribe, strife, strike, stripe, sprite
	Long o
4	broke, smoke, spoke, clone, crone, drone, stone, grope, slope, scope, score, store, snore, swore, globe, probe, stole, close, drove, stove, cloak, croak, groan, boast, coast, roast, toast, bloat, float, throat, blown, flown, grown
5	stroke, strode

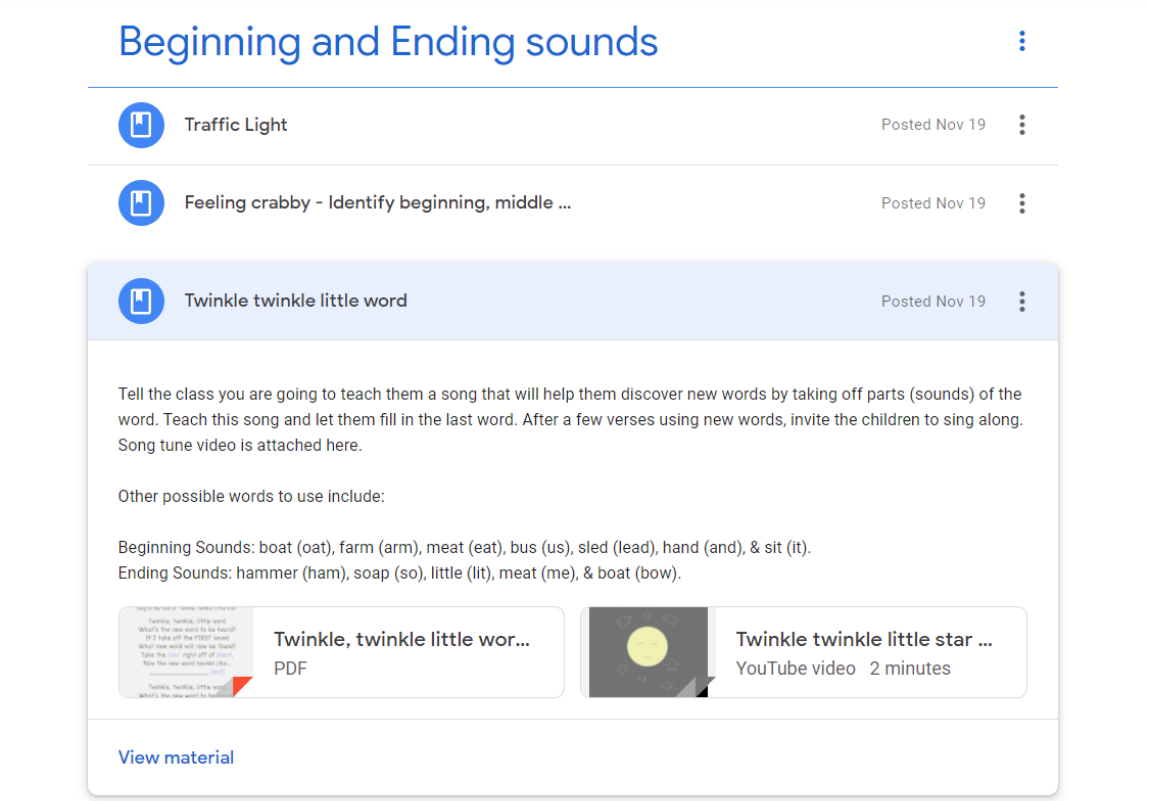
4) Beginning and ending sounds

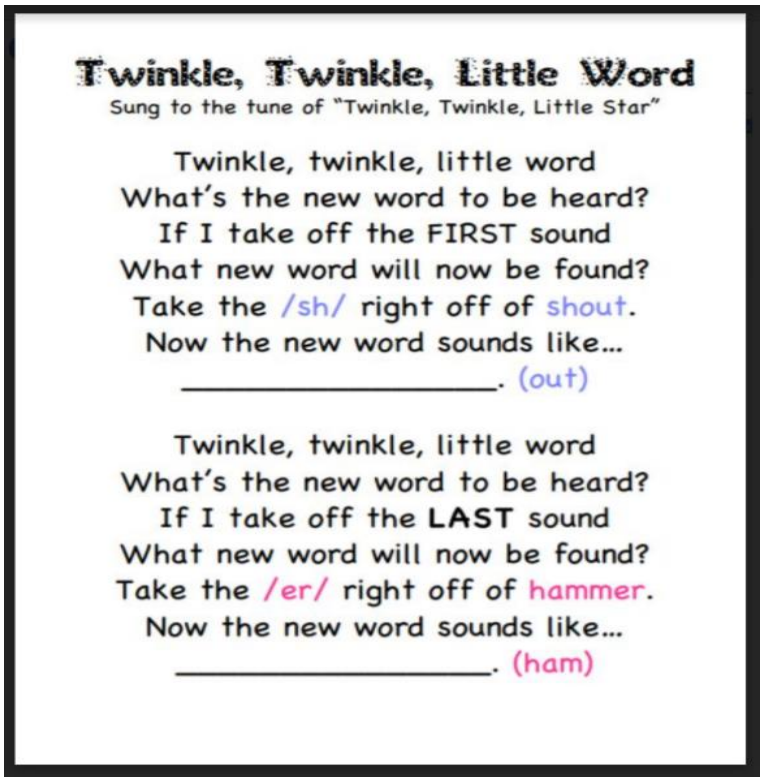
Recognizing beginning and ending sounds is a subskill that promotes phonemic awareness. In this type of activities, children isolate beginning and ending sounds hearing distinct sounds. In this project, the three activities listed under this subheading are: traffic light, feeling crabby – identifying beginning, middle and ending sounds, and twinkle, twinkle, little word.

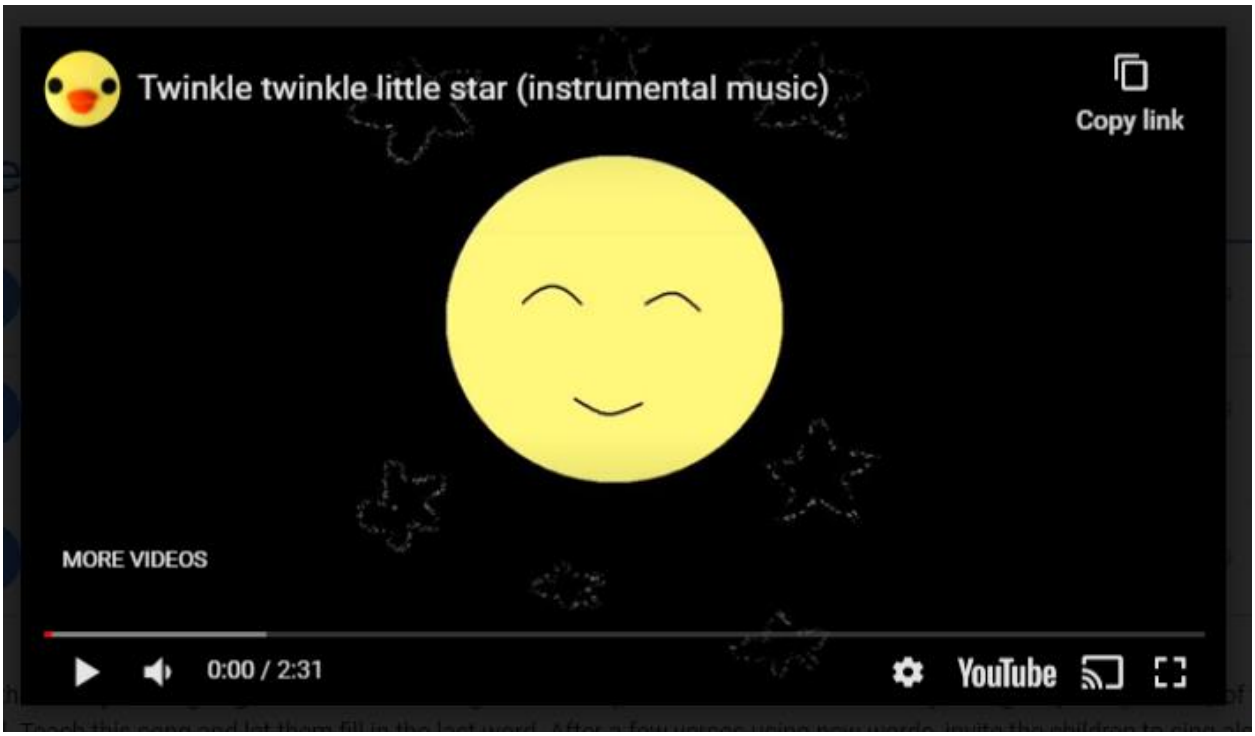
For the activity “Twinkle, twinkle, little word” the teacher tells the class she/he is going to teach them a song that will help them discover new words by taking off sounds of the word. He/she teaches this song and lets stuudents fill in the last word. After a few verses using new words, she/he invites the children to sing along. Song tune video is attached in the post, as well as, other possible words to use that include:

Beginning Sounds: boat (oat), farm (arm), meat (eat), bus (us), sled (lead), hand (and), and sit (it).

Ending Sounds: hammer (ham), soap (so), little (lit), meat (me), and boat (bow).





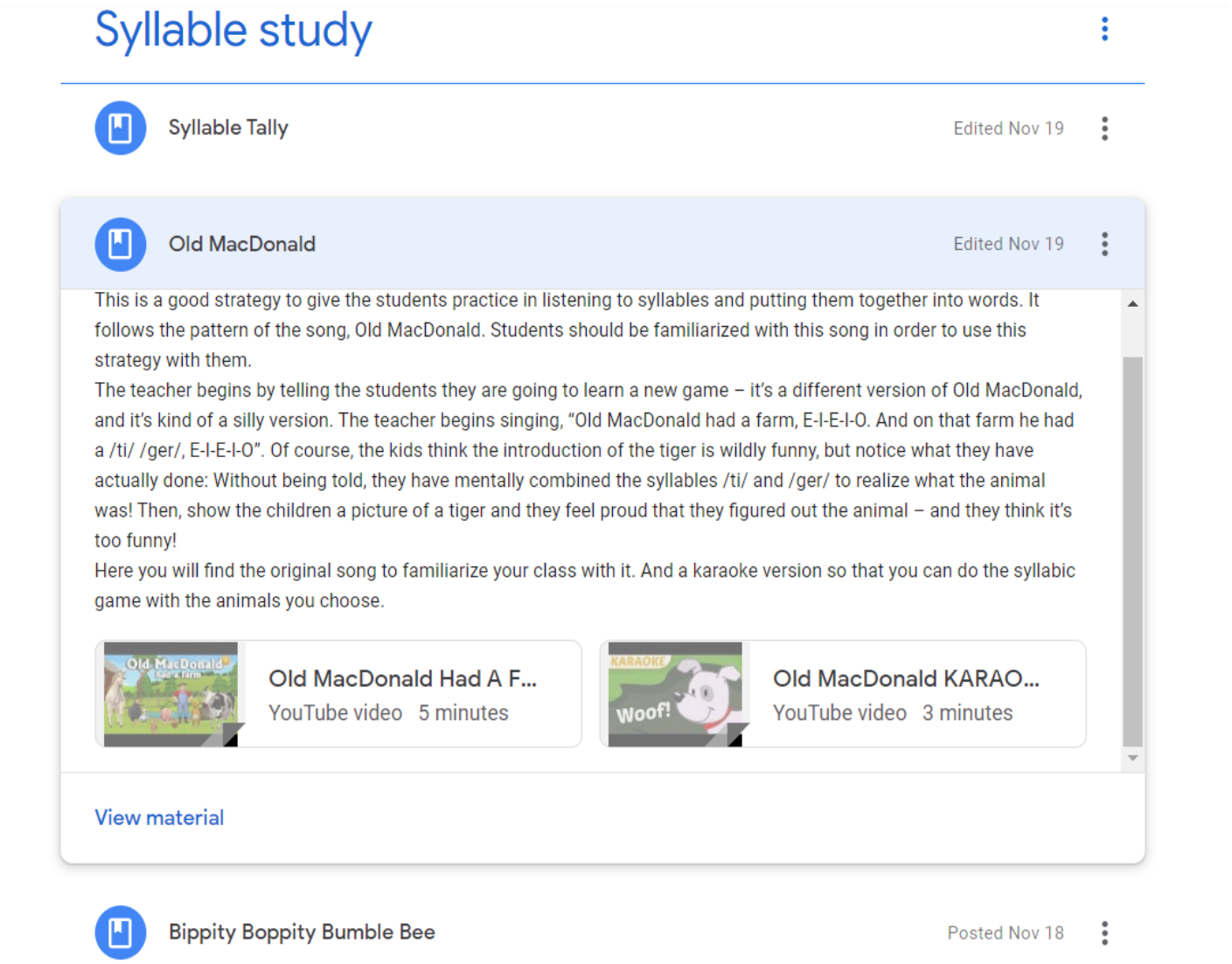


5) Syllable study

A syllable is a word, or a part of a word, with one vowel sound. When describing syllables to children, they can be called chunks, or word parts. By having students train with syllable strategies, they gain the ability to hear phonemes that comprise words and to explore speech sounds. In the syllable study section of this project, the user will find three strategies: syllable tally, old MacDonald, and bippity boppity bumble bee.

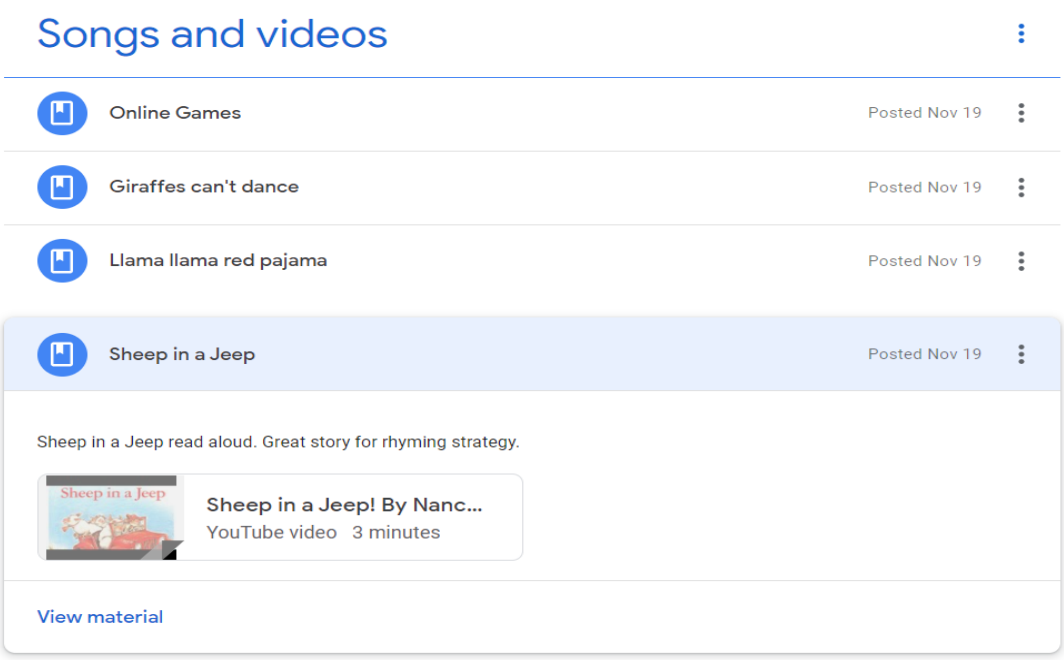
"Old MacDonald" is a good strategy to give students practice in listening to syllables and putting them together into words. It follows the pattern of the song, Old MacDonald. Students should be familiarized with this song in order to use this strategy with them. The teacher begins by telling the students they are going to learn a new game – it's a different version of Old MacDonald, and its kind of a silly version. The teacher begins singing, "Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O. And on that farm he had a /ti/ /ger/, E-I-E-I-O". Of course, the kids think the introduction of the tiger is wildly funny, but notice what they have actually

done: Without being told, they have mentally combined the syllables /ti/ and /ger/ to realize what the animal was! Then, show the children a picture of a tiger and they will feel proud that they figured out the animal! In the post, the user will find the original song to familiarize the class with it, as well as, a karaoke version to do the syllabic game with the animals the teacher chooses.



6) Songs and videos

The last subheading of this website is called songs and videos. This section features videos with read alouds of books used to train phonemic awareness, as well as, children's songs for this specific skill. The user can also find links to free online games that help strengthen the student's phonemic awareness skill.



Songs and videos

Online Games — Posted Nov 19

Free online games to train phonemic awareness.

- Clifford the Big Red Dog: ...
  http://teacher.scholastic.com...
- The Chicken Coop: Profe...
  http://www.professorgarfield....
- Word Gobble - FunbrainJ...
  http://www.funbrainjr.com/ga...

View material

- Giraffes can't dance — Posted Nov 19
- Llama llama red pajama — Posted Nov 19
- Sheep in a Jeep — Posted Nov 19

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Learning to speak English as a second language is a growing trend throughout the world. However, one of the main challenges students face when learning the English language is effective oral communication. Research demonstrates that correct English pronunciation increases intelligibility and comprehensibility. It also gives the speaker confidence to produce oral speech. Most pronunciation issues are rooted in the difference between the phonological systems of the learner's native language and the targeted language, in this case English. In other words, the first language's phonological system influences the perception of the second language's sounds. In most cases, sounds that are not in the native language's phonological system are hard for the learner to distinguish and letters that are in both languages can be confusing when their sounds are not produced the same in both of the languages.

Pronunciation is an important factor in effective communication. According to the research cited in this work, the communicative competences of English language learners improve when they have some knowledge of the phonemic features specific of the English language. This knowledge helps students to try to acquire better pronunciation, similar to native English speakers, by helping students understand where and how each phoneme is pronounced. Many miscommunication problems rooted in pronunciation and poor L2 phonemic awareness may be prevented or fixed by training students through explicit phonemic instruction. For this reason, the incorporation of phonology and phonemic awareness in the ESL curriculum is essential to develop good English pronunciation.

This project aims to support English teachers and parents of English learners when looking for strategies to teach phonemic awareness. In this project, the user will find a compilation of strategies to carry out in a classroom setting in whole-group instruction, or even small-group instruction. The variety of activities is key. Some of the activities can be used when teaching one-on-one, so parents are benefitted from navigating through this electronic resource. All the strategies compiled are thought to be engaging and each post includes vivid materials to catch the attention of the young learners. Songs and tunes are also included when the strategies require them. Also, there are links to free online phonemic awareness games to keep children entertained while learning.

As of the writing of this paper, the electronic resource created compiles three activities per each phonemic awareness subskill. However, the objective for the future of this project is to keep developing it by adding more strategies and by making it available to colleagues and parents of students that are learning English. Another long-term goal of this project is to create a collaborative space by having users from around the world to give feedback. They will share what strategies worked best for them or what changes they made to the strategies that fit their group's specific needs.

I really enjoyed the creation of this project. I am amazed by the amount of research I found pointing to phonemic awareness as a precursor of successful reading and correct English pronunciation. From my own experience, as an English teacher in Costa Rica for over nine years, I am very hopeful that by informing and providing this type of professional development resources to English teachers English learners will be greatly benefitted. I have observed myself, and corroborated with the literature review of this project, that knowledge of phoneme production and awareness triggers students' confidence in oral production.

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